

Onesimus

The third man we will explore in further detail of the men whom we know had face-to-face contact with Paul while here in Rome during this two year prison stay mentioned in ACTS 28:30 & 31 is Onesimus. Unlike Timothy and Epaphroditus, whom Paul was very familiar with before getting to Rome, Onesimus was probably unknown to Paul before this Roman imprisonment. Timothy and Epaphroditus we noted above were by now themselves Church Apostles, with whom Paul had the deepest fellowship. This is not to say that Paul didn't have very deep fellowship with Onesimus, for we know he did, but Onesimus got started on his race course at a later time than Timothy and Epaphroditus. Yet Onesimus wasn't left out in benefiting from Paul's gospel, nor can we say that Onesimus didn't take hold of Paul's message like Timothy and Epaphroditus had. Certainly Onesimus had laid before him the very same foundation that Timothy and Epaphroditus were established upon. Let's look at this for a moment.

We find the word "foundation" fifty-four times in scripture, and twelve of these times are in Paul's epistles. For example in 1 CORINTHIANS 3:9-11 we read: *For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. 10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. 11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.* The foundation which Paul laid, and built his doctrine upon was Jesus Christ. Look at what Paul wrote in EPHESIANS 2. EPHESIANS 2:19 *Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;* 20 *And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;* 21 *In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord;* 22 *In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.* Paul's foundational message begins like this: ROMANS 5:6 *...Christ died for the ungodly.* ROMANS 5:8 *But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* 1 CORINTHIANS 15:3 *For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;* 4 *And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:...* ROMANS 10:9 *That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. 10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.* Recall here also what happened to Paul and Silas back in ACTS 16 when they were prisoners in the Philippian jail. At midnight the Lord caused a great earthquake as prisoners Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God at that darkest of hours. The jailor then afraid for his own life said: *....Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house....* ACTS 16:30 & 31. Upon that foundation was built the Philippian church. Perhaps that very same story was told to Onesimus here at Rome by a fellow named the Apostle Paul, but we are kind of getting ahead of the story of Onesimus here.

We find Onesimus mentioned by name in two scriptures: COLOSSIANS 4:9 & PHILEMON 1:10. COLOSSIANS 4:9 *With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here.* PHILEMON 1:10 *I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds:...* These two scriptures really just introduce Onesimus to us, and the epistle to PHILEMON explains the history about the character Onesimus. So then we find the most information about Onesimus in PHILEMON, with the additional important tidbit noted above in COLOSSIANS 4:9 that he was from Colosse.

Onesimus then causes us to examine the letter written to Paul's friend Philemon, an outstanding Christian man living in Colosse. And even though this short epistle of PHILEMON contains only one chapter of 25 verses, it has immense value in explaining practical Christian love. We said this in our introduction to this portion of our study on the life of Paul: "PHILEMON is a tremendous love story showing how the love of Christ is

to be properly manifested one to another. Included in this short epistle is lessons on practical righteousness, Christian courtesy, Christian brotherhood, and how the grace of God is to be magnified, and manifested through our lives." {Review page 1147 of these notes.} Most importantly this one chapter book of PHILEMON emphasizes some outstanding qualities of a full overcomer. And even though PHILEMON contains only 25 verses, it also lists seven of the ten men who visited Paul while he was in prison in Rome for the two plus years mentioned in ACTS 28:30 & 31. Their names are highlighted in the following verses: PHILEMON 1:1 *Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer,...* ...10 *I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds: ...23 There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus; 24 Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers.*

Back to Onesimus, let's look at his snap shot found in PHILEMON to get an overview, which we can examine in more detail. PHILEMON 1:8 *Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient, 9 Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ. 10 I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds: 11 Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me: 12 Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels: 13 Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel: 14 But without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly. 15 For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever; 16 Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord? 17 If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. 18 If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; 19 I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides. 20 Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord. 21 Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say.*

In the above verses we find Paul's Holy Ghost inspired words concerning Onesimus. As we view Onesimus in these verses realize that Philemon is very familiar with Onesimus, and has a very different perspective of his runaway slave than the one Paul portrays in these verses. Philemon's view of Onesimus was developed before Onesimus got saved. Paul's view of Onesimus, which we just read, is of a new man, a changed individual, a new creation in Christ Jesus, a born again Christian; a new person Philemon had not yet seen. Paul wrote in 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17 *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: (new creation) old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.* The picture the Holy Ghost wants us to see as we view Onesimus is the qualities found in the life of a full overcomer. Thus as we study the events concerning Onesimus we not only see his snap shot, but an entire photo album: his past, present, and future.

Sister Bodie wrote a study book on PHILEMON, in which she noted: "It is claimed that the Phrygian slave was the lowest and most debased of all types to be found in heathendom. They displayed the very worst traits of character which their servile condition developed. Onesimus probably was no exception. We would infer from Paul's words that he helped himself to his master's good when he ran away. Somehow he reached Rome, the great center of the empire of that name, with a youthful yearning no doubt to see the greatest city in splendor and vice that the world had to offer." {End of quoting Sister Bodie.} This is not a very pretty picture of Onesimus sinful past, but we were all there too before accepting Jesus as our own personal Saviour.

As people we tend to rank sin in degrees, but not so with God. God views sin as sin. David wrote in PSALMS 51:5 *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.* This is true of all of us. Paul wrote in ROMANS 3:23 *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God...* . Again in ROMANS 6:23 Paul penned: *For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Recently in a sermon Brother Hawkins pointed out that the very first sinner, who was Eve, only ate of the forbidden fruit in the midst of the garden of Eden. She violated the one and only commandment that was given her, and Adam to follow. Her penalty passed on to all

mankind, death. My point in noting all of this is to get us to realize that Onesimus sinful past is really no different than any of our own sinful past in God's eyes. Onesimus needed a Saviour, just like you and I need a Saviour. Perhaps Paul's dealing with Onesimus helped inspire his writing some of the thoughts we find in EPHESIANS, which was written from the very same prison where Paul and Onesimus were brought together. Such thoughts are found in EPHESIANS 2 for example. EPHESIANS 2:1 *And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; 2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: 3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, 5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) 6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: 7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*

The Lord uses Onesimus to connect Paul and Philemon together in a deeper way because of their mutual love of Christ Jesus. Onesimus name means: "profitable or useful." Yet before coming to Rome and meeting Paul, and accepting Jesus as his personal Saviour, Onesimus the servant was anything but "profitable or useful," especially to Philemon, his master. Paul even stated this in PHILEMON 1:11 concerning Onesimus: *Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me:...* In fact studying about Onesimus becomes profitable and useful to us also.

To help us understand the mind set of Philemon a little better, let me expound some thoughts I came across in my research on the Phrygian slave under Roman law. Basically they had no rights, and this was expressed in the writings of Roman law with the words "servile caput nullum jus habet," meaning "the slave has no right." On the other side was the master, whose power over the slave was unlimited. Under Roman law the slave was a piece of property viewed the same as cattle, or some other animal. The cruel Roman slave masters sometimes had their slaves killed for their own satisfaction, without fear of suffering any kind of punishment under Roman law! On top of that tracking fugitive slaves was a trade, and the recovered slave was then branded on the fore head. The slave population far out numbered the free Roman citizen. Recall back in ACTS 22:25-29 Paul had a discussion with the Roman centurion and the Roman captain concerning his own Roman citizenship. Roman citizenship was a big deal. Here is what was said in ACTS 22:25 *And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? 26 When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman. 27 Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. 28 And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born. 29 Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.* The point of this discussion is to note that Paul well knew both sides of the situation between slave master Philemon and his slave Onesimus, and what was allowed by Roman law, and what was not. He also had written in 1 CORINTHIANS 7:22 this statement: *For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant.* So with the mind of the Lord, Paul in his letter to PHILEMON, sheds practical light on how Philemon and Onesimus were now to view each other, which was as brothers in Christ equally justified by His precious shed blood!

Paul is very careful in his letter to PHILEMON in how he brings up the name of Onesimus, and note that Paul only mentions Onesimus once by name. As Paul the aged, and full of wisdom from the Holy Ghost, Paul knew that the mere mention of the name Onesimus might stir up anger in the flesh of Philemon, and this was not the intent of Paul's writing him. Paul wished the focus of Philemon to be upon the Lord, and

His exceeding abundantly above all, more than we could ask or think love toward all the Saints. {Study EPHESIANS 3:13-21.} So with guidance from the Holy Ghost Paul wrote in PHILEMON 1:4 *I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers, 5 Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints; 6 That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus. 7 For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother. With statements like ...Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints;... and ...we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother... it is kind of hard to conjure up thoughts of animosity toward anyone who also loves the Lord Jesus, isn't it? Especially if one is running a race to win Christ as Bridegroom, and expects to be a full overcomer. Using these words of encouragement as an introduction, Paul then changes the subject to Philemon using the carefully chosen word "wherefore" in verse 8. PHILEMON 1:8 *Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient, 9 Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ. Brother Hill taught the serious Bible student that the words "therefore" and "wherefore" are significant, especially in Paul's gospel. The words "therefore" and "wherefore" as used by Paul are words which gather all the things that have taken place in the verses just prior to their use, and put a spotlight on the things that follow in the verse or verses just after their usage. {Review pages 192 of these notes.} Here in PHILEMON 1:8 Paul begins to bring focus upon Onesimus, putting him in a light that Philemon has never seen in the life of Onesimus, that being Onesimus shown in the Light of Christ!**

In both verses 9 and 10 Paul uses the Greek word that translates into English "beseech" as a double emphasis of the importance of what he is about to say concerning Onesimus. The Greek word translated here "beseech" is parakaleo {par-ak-al-eh'-o} (number 3870 in the Strong's Greek Concordance), which we have come across before when it was translated "desired" in ACTS 28:14. {Review page 1063 of these notes.} Parakaleo comes from two Greek words; para meaning: near; and kaleo meaning: to call, thus simply put parakaleo translates into English as "to call near." Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Word's tells us that parakaleo means to call to one's side, or to one's aid, to admonish, exhort, to urge one to pursue some course of conduct looking to the future. Here in verses 9 and 10 of PHILEMON, Paul is exhorting Philemon to pursue a high calling course of conduct concerning Onesimus, and their future together looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of their faith. Yet Paul does not exactly state all of this in one simple sentence. Paul yields to the guidance of the Holy Ghost as to how to present this overcoming concept unto Philemon. Skillfully in verse 10 Paul, in the Greek translations, mentions the name of Onesimus last, putting a favorable description of him before spelling out the name that had fallen into bad repute with Philemon. James Moffatt's translation of verse 10 reads: "I appeal to you on behalf of my spiritual son born while I was in prison. It is Onesimus... ."

Certainly Philemon couldn't come up with any redeeming thoughts concerning that old scoundrel Onesimus, and Paul knew this could be the case. So Paul was inspired of the Holy Ghost to write Philemon words that would re-emphasize a commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ that Philemon, and all Christians are given to follow. We have many times noted this commandment all throughout this study, for Jesus commandment is repeated thirteen times with the same words in twelve scriptures, which we will now read. In JOHN 13 we read these very words of Jesus spoken at the last supper: JOHN 13:34 *A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. 35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. Again in JOHN 15 we read some more words spoken by Jesus the night of the last supper. JOHN 15:9 *As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. 10 If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. 11 These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. 12 This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. 13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. 14 Ye**

are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. 15 Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. 16 Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. 17 These things I command you, that ye love one another.

The Apostle John, who was present at the last supper, heard this commandment, and took it to heart, and repeated Jesus words several more times in scripture. John wrote in 1 JOHN 3:11 *For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another*. 1 JOHN 3:23 *And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment*. 1 JOHN 4:7 *Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God*. 1 JOHN 4:11 *Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another*. 1 JOHN 4:12 *No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us*.

The Apostle Peter too was present at the last supper, and he wrote in 1 PETER 1:22 *Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:...*

The Apostle Paul, who received his gospel message by the revelation of Jesus Christ, (GALATIANS 1:12), also wrote "to love one another" in the following verses: ROMANS 13:8 *Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law*. 1 THESSALONIANS 4:9 *But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another*. Additionally Paul wrote many other similar scriptures, such as: ROMANS 12:10 *Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love: in honour preferring one another;...* . EPHESIANS 4:2 *With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;...* . HEBREWS 13:1 *Let brotherly love continue*. Plus there are many other portions in Paul's writings where we are taught more about loving one another, such as 1 CORINTHIANS 13, and back here in our lessons found in PHILEMON.

So after much prayer and meditation Paul encourages Philemon to now view the new man in Christ Jesus, Onesimus, in His Light; in His Love. Here is how Paul wrote Philemon to love Onesimus. PHILEMON 1:10 *I beseech thee (which we learned above means: I exhort thee to pursue to the high calling of God in Christ Jesus for yourself, and encouraging the same course...) for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds: 11 Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me: 12 Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels: 13 Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel: 14 But without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly. 15 For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever; 16 Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord? 17 If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. 18 If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; 19 I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides. 20 Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord. 21 Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say*.

For a few moments let's zero in on some thoughts brought up in verses 13 through 16, which reference the master/servant relationship. How Philemon thought of himself concerning Onesimus we are not told. Perhaps Philemon had several slaves, for Roman history records of there being Roman masters who owned as many as 20,000 slaves! Maybe Onesimus was the only servant of Philemon, but we are not told any of this in scripture. No doubt Onesimus had expressed his own opinions on Philemon to Paul. Yet Paul endeavored to view each other in the light of eternity, in the Light of Jesus, and their current value to the ministry of the gospel of Christ. (Remember old Saul of Tarsus

had hateful opinions of Christians before being blinded by the Light of Jesus on the road to Damascus, and that blindness opened his eyes enabling him to see the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour. At that instant old things, old opinions passed away, and behold all things became new. Again 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17 expresses it like this: *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.* On the road to Damascus old Saul of Tarsus had no thought of being profitable, or even knowing what a full overcomer was, but the Lord Jesus Christ knew that he could take this very religious sinful man from being the lowest of the gutter most, and set him on the heights of the uttermost. This man Saul of Tarsus who was of no value to the ministry of Christ became very profitable to the gospel as our Apostle Paul. By this time in Paul's life while a prisoner at Rome he knew that Philemon could have God's best, as well as Onesimus. What about you?) Certainly Philemon had no idea that Onesimus could possibly be profitable, or useful in the ministry, yet Paul wrote in verse 13 this about Onesimus: *Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel:...* . Perhaps Onesimus was in the prison room with Paul when Paul wrote PHILIPPIANS 2:3 *Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.* With this frame of mind focused upon Christ the master/servant relationship changes. So we find Onesimus and Philemon's connection in some other thoughts expressed by Paul in EPHESIANS and COLOSSIANS concerning the master/servant relationship. EPHESIANS 6:5 *Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; 6 Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; 7 With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: 8 Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. 9 And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.* Now read a similar statement found in COLOSSIANS 3:22 *Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: 23 And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; 24 Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. 25 But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons. 4:1 Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.* This then was instructions to both Philemon and Onesimus, and us too, on how to treat one another, which is with love and respect as unto the Lord. Peter found this out in Cornelius house, and said in ACTS 10:34 *...Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:...* . Master or slave, bond or free, boss or employee, representative or constituent, rich or poor, young or old it doesn't matter, God is no respecter of persons. And as Christians we are given commandment "to love one another." EPHESIANS 5:2 *And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.*

For whose benefit was the epistle of PHILEMON written? Onesimus' or Philemon's? We could say both really, but at first thought we probably think that it was for the benefit of Philemon that this letter was written. 2 TIMOTHY 3:16 informs us that *...All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:...* . And this letter to PHILEMON is now scripture, from which we all too can benefit. Why even mention this? Because there are a couple of thoughts found in this short epistle that directly point to the word "benefit." The first is found in verse 8: *Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient,...* . The Greek word that is here translated "convenient" is *aneko* {an-ay'-ko}, number 433 in The Strong's Greek Concordance, which here means: what is fitting, as in benefiting. It carries the thought of that which comes up to the mark; fitting. Thus verse 8 could be thought of like this: "Wherefore, though having much boldness in Christ, and with His authority to speak very freely to give you directions to take a course that is of supreme benefit." Such terms point us to qualities found in a full overcomer, and this is what also benefits us. This is a good thing, and there is another Greek word used twice in PHILEMON that means "a good

thing,” which also translates as “benefit.” The word is agathos {ag-ath-os'}, number 18 in The Strong's Greek Concordance. We find it in verse 6: *That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing (benefit <18>) which is in you in Christ Jesus.* And in verse 14: *But without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit <18> should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.* As we continue to study how the Holy Ghost inspired Paul to help reconnect Onesimus to Philemon for both of their eternal benefit, we too should appreciate the over coming qualities that are pointed to here in Paul's letter.

There is another lesson on SPIRITUAL PERFECTION, and SPIRITUAL COMPLETION brought out in PHILEMON as we study Onesimus, which is found in the Greek word translated “receive” in PHILEMON 1:12 & 17. Seven times in New Testament scripture the Greek word proslambano {pros-lam-ban'-o}, number 4355 in The Strong's Greek Concordance, is translated “receive,” with the meaning used here meaning to take to oneself, or to receive, signifying a special interest on the part of the receiver, suggesting a welcome into one's home with the collateral idea of kindness. The complete thought behind all of this is of granting access to one's heart. PHILEMON 1:12 *Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels:...* ...17 *If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.* Do you think Philemon would receive Paul into his house? Paul knew he would, and even wrote in verse 22 *But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.* The thought Paul was bringing to Philemon was even deeper than this, for Paul was really instructing Philemon to receive Onesimus into his house as he had received Christ into his own heart. GALATIANS 4:6 *And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.* ROMANS 15:7 *Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.*

Paul uses another word with considerable frequency as he writes letters from his Roman prison, and this word expresses his own inward affections; his own heart felt compassion, and tender mercies. This word in The Strong's Greek Concordance is number 4698 splanchnon {splanekh'-non}, which seems to lose a lot of meaning by being commonly translated “bowels” in our King James version of the Bible. So as we quote these scriptures think of “inward affections,” or “tender mercies,” or a “heart full of compassion” instead of the word “bowels.” PHILEMON 1:7 *For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels (hearts) of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.* ...12 *Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels: (very heart)...* ...20 *Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels (heart) in the Lord.* To the Colossian Saints, to whom Onesimus was sent, and mentioned in COLOSSIANS 4:9, which church met in Philemon's house, Paul wrote: *Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels (a heart of compassion) of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;...* COLOSSIANS 3:12. And then in PHILIPPIANS Paul twice uses this word: PHILIPPIANS 1:8 *For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels (tender Christian affection) of Jesus Christ.* ...2:1 *If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels (tender-heartedness and compassion) and mercies, 2 Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.* Thus we get a better picture of the compassionate loving heart attitude of Paul as he wrote these epistles, which points back to that discussion we had above on the love of God. If you can't see the love of God manifested in the heart of Paul as he writes PHILEMON, then read it again, and again until you do.

So far in our discussions on Onesimus and Philemon we have mainly dealt with Paul's instructions to Philemon on how he was to view Onesimus from this point forward, and that being as a joint-heir himself with Jesus Christ. A sugkleronomos Saint in other words, which we noted when referencing ROMANS 8:17 earlier in this study. {Review pages 932-936 of these notes.} Sugkleronomos {soong-klay-ron-om'-os} is number 4789 in the Strong's Greek Concordance, and is translated “joint-heirs with Christ” in ROMANS 8:17, which reads: *And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.* Yes, now a Christian, even Onesimus could qualify for joint-heirship with Christ, as well as Philemon. This was what Paul was trying to get Philemon to see in his letter to PHILEMON. In order for Philemon to grasp this concept, he first must get a hold

of ROMANS 8:1 *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.* (Period). Perhaps that's an easy scripture for you to grasp on to for yourself, but not so easy for you to lay a hold of for someone else. Let me explain. Let's say so and so Christian did something they shouldn't have, and you know they did it, so without much thinking, you throw them under the bus (so to speak). Essentially in your own mind you just condemned them, violating ROMANS 8:1 *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.* Come back to Philemon and Onesimus. Couldn't Philemon argue with one hundred per cent certainty: "Onesimus my servant stole from me, and ran away with some of my goods?" Yes he could. Paul wanted Philemon to be an overcomer here, and see Onesimus in a brighter light, and realize that now as a Christian ...*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.* In other words Jesus took care of Onesimus' sin on the cross. Further more Paul wanted Philemon to realize that Onesimus, whose name again means: "profitable or useful," is now really ready to be "profitable and useful" to Philemon, and to the ministry that took place in Philemon's house! Paul could have easily wrote Philemon to review what he wrote in his ROMANS epistle starting in chapter 8 with the verses we noted above, and continue from verse 28: *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. 29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. 31 What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? 32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? 33 Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. 34 Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. 37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. 38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, 39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Perhaps as you study PHILEMON, you wonder why Onesimus wasn't saved earlier in the church that was in Philemon's house? Only the Lord knows the answer to such questions. This church was at Colosse, which name has a double meaning: "correction," and also "monstrosities." Paul addresses these situations in his broader letter written unto the COLOSSIANS. But the issues between Onesimus and Philemon, Paul sweetly deals with in this short epistle of PHILEMON. And we find the heart attitude of the full overcomer in the way Paul brings these two men back together, getting them to see each other as sons of God, equivalents in Christ Jesus. Again we are reminded of PHILIPPIANS 2:3 *Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.* Yet we still wonder why Onesimus wasn't saved earlier in the church that was in Philemon's house? Possibly Philemon had never let Onesimus be a part of the church services in his house. We are not told this one way or the other. There are two possibilities to consider here. Either Onesimus was given the opportunity to be a part of the church services that took place in the house of Philemon, or he wasn't. Obviously PHILEMON 1:10 tells us that Onesimus didn't get saved until the time he was found in Paul's prison cell. So if Onesimus was allowed to be a part of the church services that took place in Philemon's house, he didn't become a believer at that time. If Onesimus wasn't given opportunity by Philemon to come to know Jesus as his own personal Saviour, whether in a church service, or in his duties in the master/servant relationship, then Philemon would be the one in error having missed that opportunity. The other side of the coin is that perhaps Philemon had witnessed to Onesimus time and time again, without any response by Onesimus. However these details are not given in scripture. Paul does again record in PHILEMON 1:5 of *...Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints;... . We*

would have to think that such a loving man as Philemon was noted to be, would be praying for Onesimus, especially after he ran away. On the other hand, since getting saved do you suppose Onesimus was now praying for his old master Philemon? Probably more than ever. As an escaped slave was Onesimus really free to go where ever he wanted? Probably not, thus we find the reason for Paul's letter unto PHILEMON. One thing is certain, Onesimus had hit rock bottom by the time he ended up meeting Paul in that Roman prison, and that's when things got much better for both Onesimus, and Philemon.

We are now going to introduce another guy into this story between Onesimus and Philemon, and this man was also found in Paul's prison cell in Rome. We are talking about Epaphras, whom we find to also be Philemon's pastor! COLOSSIANS 1:7 records: *As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellow-servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ;...* Epaphras is noted in PHILEMON 1:23 to be Paul's *...fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus...* who was right there when Paul wrote Philemon concerning Onesimus. Epaphras was also there when Paul wrote this statement found in COLOSSIANS 4:12 *Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.* Here we begin to see the character of Epaphras, a prayer warrior as well as a devoted pastor. We can now begin to see how Epaphras connects Onesimus with Philemon, and can fill in the gap information to Paul concerning Onesimus and Philemon. We can see God's hand all over Onesimus in his present situation, carefully placing him in Paul's Roman prison cell at the very same time Philemon's pastor Epaphras was there! Small world isn't it? Perhaps a better statement is: a well-orchestrated-fore-ordained-perfectly-designed world, isn't it? And if Epaphras was Philemon's pastor, wasn't he also Onesimus' pastor? If he wasn't before, he is now. ROMANS 11:33 *C the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!*

We need to pause here for a moment, and see how it is possible that Epaphras connects with the Apostle Paul. Recall when Paul first traveled to Asia he was not permitted to preach there. This is noted in ACTS 16:6 *Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia,...* This was approximately in the year 51 A.D. About three years later we read in ACTS 19:10 about Paul's preaching and teaching in Ephesus, the chief city in Paul's Asia: *And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.* "All they which dwelt in Asia" included the cities of Ephesus, Laodicea forty miles to the east, and Colosse about eighteen miles further east. Since Ephesus was the cultural center of Asia, people from all over Paul's Asia would end up there, and thus we see how it is possible *...that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.* Few names of those from Ephesus, Laodicea, and Colosse are found mentioned in the book of ACTS, yet the letters Paul wrote unto the ROMANS, COLOSSIANS, and PHILEMON contain a list of many of the Saints who lived in these places. We previously noted that Brother Copley explained in the back of his EPHESIAN study book that ROMANS 16:1-20 properly belongs with the Ephesian letter. This really makes sense, especially considering that the Apostle Paul spent so much time there (three years at Ephesus). Certainly he made many friends there in addition to the enemies mentioned in scripture from that region. Why would he not acknowledge these people in scripture? It seems that he did, however the translators got that part of scripture tied in with ROMANS 16:1-20. ROMANS 16:1-20 lists 27 people, acquaintances of Paul from Ephesus. About another dozen people are mentioned by name in Paul's letter to COLOSSIANS including Epaphras and Onesimus. A majority of these people it seems learned Paul's gospel from the Apostle Paul himself. Obviously as ACTS 19:20 explained: *So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.* Epaphras could very well have been one of them, however once again scripture doesn't tell us one way or the other. For certain Epaphras did learn some more of Paul's gospel from Paul himself here in Paul's Roman prison. Someday down the road we will know the exact circumstances surrounding how it was that Epaphras came to know Paul.

Had Onesimus believed on the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour prior to his visiting Rome, we never would of had the epistle written to PHILEMON left for us to

study. Thus we find ROMANS 8:28 in action once again: *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.* Certainly Philemon couldn't have seen how Onesimus robbing him, and fleeing to points unknown could have possibly been working together for his good at that time, but later in life when Onesimus returned a forever changed man, he could. The fact that Epaphras, Philemon's pastor, was in Paul's Roman prison at the same time as Onesimus was more than sufficient witness to Onesimus that Jesus loved him, and had placed him with these two race course runners at this seemingly low point in Onesimus' life.

One important thought we need to emphasize here is that Onesimus is not said to be a fellow-prisoner of Paul's. Rather it seems that Onesimus was one of the *"...all that came in unto..."* Paul while there a prisoner in Rome, as noted in ACTS 28:30 & 31. Obviously Onesimus had hit rock bottom to venture into Paul's prison. How Onesimus came to this point in his life where he was willing to visit the prison of the Apostle Paul we are not told. Conybeare and Howson in their book on *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul* note: "It is difficult to imagine any portion of mankind more utterly depraved than the associates among whom a runaway pagan slave must have found himself in the capital. ...Yet from this lowest depth Onesimus was dragged forth by the hand of Christian love. Perhaps some Asiatic Christian, who had seen him formerly at his master's house, recognized him in the streets of Rome destitute and starving, and had compassion on him; and thus he might have been brought to hear the preaching of the illustrious prisoner." {End of quoting Conybeare and Howson.} We do know that however it was that Onesimus got to hear Paul, Onesimus then accepted Jesus as his own personal Saviour in Paul's Roman prison, a fact Paul noted in PHILEMON 1:10 *...my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds...* Jesus said in JOHN 5:24 *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.*

As we continue study the little we know of Onesimus, and the other's in the group of ten that we know visited Paul during these so called two silent years in Rome, we glimpse a better insight into the profound effect Paul's preaching had there. Recall again the way Luke recorded it in ACTS 28:30 & 31: *And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, 31 Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.* We find here that the Lord had provided Paul a secure environment to preach in, and a space large enough to receive *...all that came in unto him...* whether a wealthy Jewish business man, or lowly Phrygian run-away slave who has finally hit rock bottom. No man forbid Paul from preaching unto any of them. And it seems they came by tens, and then by hundreds, and in time by thousands, though obviously not all at once. After preaching three years in Ephesus we found above in ACTS 19:10 *...that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.* How hard is it to see here in Rome that after two years in his own hired house Paul could have reached all they which dwelt in Rome? Not too hard to see how this was possible, especially after the Lord had years before already told him in ACTS 23:11 *...Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.* The Lord is not limited as to how many at Rome Paul could bear witness unto. And Paul hinted at the growth of the gospel in Rome by the following statement found in PHILIPPIANS, written from Paul's prison quarters in his own hired house. PHILIPPIANS 1:12 *But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; 13 So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; 14 And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.* In all the palace is a broad statement that encompasses the whole Roman praetorian guard, all Italians, which numbered in the thousands, and the men of various rank within the guard, which was constantly changing as their assignments were rotated. Thus in a two year period of time a majority of this group could have been assigned to Paul's area. Additionally "in all other places" includes all the rest not part of the Roman praetorian guard. Then add to these two more groups found in PHILIPPIANS 4:22 *All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's*

household. How many is all the Saints? And how many of all the Saints were a part of those of Caesar's household? Again scripture doesn't tell us, because God doesn't want us to be impressed with such numbers. All we need to know is that one with God is a majority. So we marvel at the work God was able to do in Rome because of the ministry of one faithful prisoner, the Apostle Paul, whose prison message still reaches down to you and me today! Now how hard is it to see here in Rome that after two years in his own hired house Paul could have reached all they which dwelt in Rome? So when beaten down run-away slave Onesimus then hits town it seems it wouldn't take too long before someone could lead him to the prison ministry of Paul, and we know from ACTS 28:30 Paul *...received all that came in unto him...* exempting no one. Perhaps the hardest part for Onesimus was walking through the Roman praetorian guard security to get to see and hear Paul the first time. Once he did it was "welcome home."

How long Onesimus remained in Paul's care we are not told. Perhaps a few weeks, or maybe several months. As we discussed above Onesimus was born again in Paul's Roman prison, and became a new man. 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17 *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.* Certainly Paul considered Onesimus now an asset, for again Paul wrote in PHILEMON 1:13 *Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel...* . Obviously Onesimus was like a sponge taking in Paul's gospel. Perhaps Timothy also tutored him, as possibly did the others mentioned in PHILEMON that were also found with Paul at this time in his life, such as Epaphras, Marcus (John Mark), Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, also known as Luke, and a man that will return to Colosse with Onesimus, that being Tychicus. We will discuss some more about these men later in this study.

Note again what Paul wrote Philemon concerning Onesimus in PHILEMON 1:15 & 16 -- *For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever; 16 Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?* The thought here of Philemon receiving Onesimus *...for ever; Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved...* expresses a deeper concept taught in an Old Testament Hebrew law concerning masters and servants that really ends up pointing out a choice of perpetual service on the part of the servant who loves his master, and is willing to perform his servant duties for ever. Of course this teaching goes way beyond the natural man servant/master relationship, and speaks to the devoted service the believer is to have for his Master in heaven, which points we will cover shortly. First however let's review two portions of scripture which lay out this Old Testament law given to the children of Israel.

EXODUS 21:2 *If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing. 3 If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him. 4 If his master have given him a wife, and she have born him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. 5 And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: 6 Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever.* This being brought before the judges was to insure that oppressive masters wouldn't frighten a servant unwillingly into such an agreement. Note that *...the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free...* which statement the judges were witness too. This would also give the servant the opportunity before witnesses to exclaim that they weren't willing to go through with this ceremony, and thus be set free.

DEUTERONOMY 15:12 *And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee. 13 And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: 14 Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him. 15 And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day. 16 And it shall be, if he say unto thee, I will not go away from thee; because he*

loveth thee and thine house, because he is well with thee; 17 Then thou shalt take an aul, and thrust it through his ear unto the door, and he shall be thy servant for ever.

This Hebrew teaching Paul would have been very familiar with, yet this kind of master/servant relationship really didn't apply to Philemon and Onesimus for they weren't under the law of Moses. However both of these Christian men, Philemon and Onesimus, were taught by Paul to ...*delight in the law of God after the inward man...* ROMANS 7:22. No doubt Paul used the Old Testament teaching here to bring out the concepts that Paul wanted both Philemon and Onesimus to learn as they pursued a course of overcoming in their own lives. The regulations taught here in EXODUS 21, and DEUTERONOMY 15 were given by Moses not to promote slavery, but to repress it, and were really designed to put an end to slavery. Let me explain. First of all we must understand that in Moses day these people he led through the wilderness for forty years weren't masters of slaves, but rather had escaped the land of Egypt as former slaves themselves. We don't read of any of the children of Israel coming out of Egypt as slave masters. But in time there came occasions where a Hebrew could fall under a system of servitude. How? Let's say one Israelite owed another some money, and that he couldn't repay it. He then was compelled to give his services to his creditor for a certain period of time, which we see above was limited to a maximum of six years, at which time he was to be set free. As time went on there were Hebrews who were extremely poor, who would also offer their services for the six years to a wealthy person who then was bound to house him, clothe him and feed him in exchange for his services. Again at the end of six years such a man was to be set free. Again all of this was done in order to repress slavery, not encourage it. Another important regulation that discouraged slavery stated that when a slave ran away from his master it was contrary to law for anyone to assist in sending him back again. With such a law we see that nobody needed to remain a slave, since he could run away if he liked. Further more it was really nobody's business, and thus it was a sin for anybody to force an escaped servant back to his master again.

Of course we know that Paul would have been familiar with these Hebrew laws, yet for loves sake, (PHILEMON 1:9), and that being the love of Christ, Paul encouraged escaped slave Onesimus to return to his master Philemon, knowing the deeper concepts also taught in EXODUS 21, and DEUTERONOMY 15 concerning the perpetual service on the part of the servant who loves his master, and is willing to perform his servant duties for ever. Onesimus, after learning Paul's doctrine, was willing to return to Philemon knowing in his redeemed heart that this was the right thing to do before God. Perhaps Paul had read to Onesimus PSALMS 40, a Psalm of David.

PSALMS 40:1 I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. 2 He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. 3 And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD. 4 Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies. 5 Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered. 6 Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. 7 Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, 8 I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.

Onesimus' ears had been opened to the truth, and was now delighting ...*in the law of God after the inward man...* ROMANS 7:22. Further more Onesimus was now also delighting to do thy will oh God. Onesimus' ear essentially had been bored with the awl of truth. He was God's servant, and knew his newly learned services, which ministered unto Paul in the bonds of the gospel, (PHILEMON 1:13) would be an asset to the church that was in Philemon's house, (PHILEMON 1:2). So Paul writes PHILEMON 1:15 & 16 with these thoughts in mind, stating: *For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever; 16 Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?*

Now place ourselves back in Paul's Roman prison quarters during these two years in his own hired house as he teaches escaped servant Onesimus, and John Mark,

(Marcus), and the rest of the ten who visited him during this time, the principles of Christian master/servant relationships. Why mention John Mark here? Because he wrote the gospel according to MARK, which record pictures Christ the perfect servant. We get this from studying REVELATION 4:7 where we find the four living creatures to be types like Jesus. They have characteristics noted from the four gospel records. REVELATION 4:7 *And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.* (MATTHEW portrays Christ as the King, and Jesus is the King of kings, and Lord of lords. The lion figures the kings of beasts. MARK, written by John Mark, paints a picture of Jesus as the perfect servant, figured in REVELATION 4:7 as the faithful ox, which is the king of the domestic beasts. The ox also signifies the perfect sacrifice, which Jesus became for our sins. 1 CORINTHIANS 5:7 states, in part: *For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:...* (Lord willing a little further in this study we will talk some more about John Mark, and see a clearer picture of the steps ordered of the Lord he took to become himself a perpetual servant unto his Master in heaven.) The gospel of LUKE, written by Luke, who is also called Lucas in PHILEMON 1:24, notes many things about Christ the man, who left the lofty heights of heaven, and took those perfect seven steps down found in PHILIPPIANS 2 that took Him to the cross to be the perfect sacrifice for sinful man. PHILIPPIANS 2:5 *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.* The fourth gospel record is the gospel according to JOHN, figured by the flying eagle in REVELATION 4:7 above. The flying eagle is the king of birds. Christ's quality's figured by the flying eagle shows that He is the eternal, ageless, heavenly One. The flying eagle soars free from the pull of the world, can't be held down, and seeks those things that are above. Such too are qualities of a full overcomer. COLOSSIANS 3:1 reads: *If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.* EPHESIANS 1:21 *...Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:...*) Now back to Onesimus, and John Mark, and even Luke, which all were here in Rome with Paul as he taught the principles of Christian master/servant relationships, and also wrote them down from these same quarters in his epistles written to PHILEMON, EPHESIANS, COLOSSIANS, and PHILIPPIANS. No doubt Paul had long discussions with Onesimus, and John Mark, and Luke, perhaps all together when he wrote: EPHESIANS 6:5 *Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; 6 Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; 7 With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: 8 Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. 9 And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him. A similar statement is found in COLOSSIANS 3:22 *Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: 23 And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; 24 Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. 25 But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons. 4:1 Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven. Then perhaps Paul reviewed again the teaching of the bond servant described above in EXODUS 21 and DEUTERONOMY 15, noting how the Hebrew servant was to be freed from his servitude in the seventh year. Emphasis then was given to the one exception allowed, and that being if the servant stated that he did not wish to be free because he loved his master, his wife and his children. Once this was stated by the slave, the master of the servant was to then take an awl, and thrust the ear of the servant through the door post, and that servant was then to be his bond servant forever. Note that the bond servant willingly gave his ear unto his master. Jesus Christ Himself gave His ear unto God the Father and took upon**

Himself the form of a bond servant in PHILIPPIANS 2:7, also referenced above. To show that Jesus was bond servant unto His Father note what is said in JOHN 8:29 *And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him.* Again in PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8 we find those seven humbling steps downward that Jesus took down from heaven to be our redeemer. PHILIPPIANS 2:5 *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, (bond servant in the Greek) and was made in the likeness of men: 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.* In giving His ear unto God the Father, Jesus demonstrates what it takes to be a full overcomer. All full overcomers too will, like the bond servant, give their ear unto Christ. *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.* Brother Copley also notes that “great prominence is given to a listening ear. If we put our ears up to God’s will and let Him bore them thru with the awl of truth, we will learn the deep secrets of the Lord.” Are you willing to give your ear to Him? Onesimus was, and was sent back to his master Philemon way above the rank of a servant, for Paul called him a profitable brother beloved who ministered even to Paul in the gospel! Do you want to see what a New Testament full overcomer looks like? Study again Onesimus, whose name again means: “profitable or useful.” Certainly Philemon found Onesimus both “profitable” and “useful” as Onesimus encouraged Philemon to finish his race course with joy and rejoicing in the Lord, always looking up to Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith, *...who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God...* HEBREWS 12:2. Thus in the end we find both Onesimus and Philemon encouraged to be in perpetual service to their Master in heaven.

Here is an interesting tidbit I came across in my research written by John McRay in his book *Archaeology And The New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, 1991, page 247). “An inscription erected by a freed slave from Laodicea was dedicated to Marcus Sestius Philemon. It will be recalled that a Philemon who owned the slave Onesimus (PHILEMON 1:10) was a leader in the church of Colossae. We cannot identify this Philemon with the slaveholder to whom Paul wrote, but the coincidence of the inscription from the same area is intriguing, especially since it refers to the manumission of a slave.”

Epaphras

In our discussion of Onesimus we briefly introduced Philemon’s pastor, Epaphras who is noted in PHILEMON 1:23 to be Paul’s *...fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus...* right there with Paul as he wrote Philemon concerning Onesimus. {Review page 1167 of these notes.} Epaphras was also there when Paul wrote these statements found in COLOSSIANS. COLOSSIANS 1:7 & 8 *As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ; 8 Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.* . COLOSSIANS 4:12 *Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.* We also noted above some hints of the character of Epaphras noted in these verses; a prayer warrior as well as a devoted pastor. As Paul continued to expound his gospel message everyday from his Roman prison, men like Epaphras and Onesimus were like sponges taking in *...the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified...* ACTS 20:32. The beneficiaries of this teaching included those in the church that was in the house of Philemon there at Colosse. Again imagine the day, if it came to pass, when Epaphras and Onesimus were later once again in Philemon’s church, both now ministering in this assembly, and how their very presence blessed this congregation.

Epaphras means “foam covered” expressing figuratively the labour and travail of this traveling teacher and pastor as he was *...always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God... ..that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis...* COLOSSIANS 4:12 & 13. Sister Bodie notes that “he was covered with foam, labouring in their behalf,